

Evaluations of the Institute Program

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Reactions by a School Librarian

It may appear strange to a group of public library children's librarians to have a school librarian in their midst; however, elementary school librarians are children's librarians, too, and I am delighted that the planners of the institute share this view. I admit that I love my job, but do not love all children; liking children and liking to work with them in a library is what is important. My favorite professional colleagues have always been public children's librarians and the ALA involvement that has brought me the greatest satisfaction has been with the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). Therefore, to be included at this institute discussing children's services of public libraries seems very fitting.

I have tried to pinpoint problems mentioned at this institute that are common to both school and public libraries. Some concerns were brought up by more than one speaker. Peggy Sullivan referred to the isolation of the children's librarian. Mary Jane Anderson pointed out the geographical isolation (except for those in urban areas) of children's librarians. I submit that school librarians are even more in isolation. They neither work in a building with another librarian nor under an administrator with a background in librarianship. The solution for both school and public librarians appears to be simple. Every suburban branch is surrounded by several elementary school libraries. Why are there seldom, if ever, mutual meetings, mutual exchanges, sharing of mutual concerns? Why are we not united in our communities, sharing goals and

solving problems together? Why does a feeling of noncooperation exist? Surely it is not because the issue of public and school cooperation has never been dealt with in the literature. As long ago as 1948, ALA published *A National Plan for Public Library Service*¹ advocating the development of a formula to meet this need. As recently as summer 1977, the research findings of Esther R. Dyer were published in *School Media Quarterly*.² Dyer's discouraging conclusion is that both public and school librarians are "shut . . . up in a tower of cooperative virtue,"³ powerless to bring about cooperation while busily blaming one another for its lack. We appear to be motivated — or not motivated, depending on your point of view — by the fear that each of us will lose our autonomy.

There are other current issues that encourage cooperation. Mainstreaming of the handicapped and the need that this long-overdue movement creates for special skills and materials is one. The passage of this federal law has not brought a stampede to our doors, but the time to be ready is before, not after, the first arrival. The special needs of gifted children is another. Such children are difficult to identify without sharing the results of testing and observation in the schools. Canney also reminded us in his presentation that the very important preschool years prepare children for learning to read. School librarians are not aware of the extent to which we depend on the public librarian to make this preparation before the children enter kindergarten. We need to be told and to share our knowledge of the reading process with you.

Media selection as a problem for the less media-experienced public children's librarians was mentioned by both Barbara Rollock and Bridget Lamont. School librarians are nonprint media specialists by necessity. Most school media centers on the elementary level have at minimum a collection of filmstrips, cassette tapes and disk recordings; some also have 8mm loop films, microfiche and videotapes, and the equipment for their use, much of which the children may borrow for home use. District-wide preview and evaluation procedures screen new materials before purchase. This information must be shared if limited budgets are to be spent wisely and the best material provided for our patrons.

Zero population growth (ZPG) is a cause I support in spite of the fact that it was probably a factor in the closing last June of the 14-year-old school in which I had served as sole librarian from its beginning. I left there a library created into a model media center through an ESEA Title II grant, predominantly green (the color Margaret Bush described as most desirable for children's libraries) and having the recommended conference room, large workroom for projects, private places, and complete visibility. How the closing of schools all over the country will affect children's services in public libraries is not entirely clear, but it

certainly must follow that for many children, the public library and not the school library, will become geographically the nearest library to their homes.

Barbara Rollock reminded us of the New York State Commissioner of Education's Committee on Library Development which, in the early part of this decade, recommended that all services to children, preschool through grade six, be the responsibility of the elementary school media centers. A task force drew up guidelines for a pilot project. Shortly before this conference, I received a letter from Lore Scurrah,⁴ Chief of the New York State Bureau of School Libraries, stating that because of a continuing lack of funds, plans for the pilot project had been shelved and would not be resubmitted. Had the pilot been successful and in favor of the recommendation, children's rooms might no longer exist in New York State today.

Scurrah referred to a new project for her department — networking, a heated topic at this conference. Elementary school librarians in general would be surprised at this, for some are just beginning to recognize its implications. Perhaps that is part of the reason for the present situation that excludes children's materials in resource-sharing. We need public children's librarians to wake us up and we need to work together toward equal rights for children.

The spirited discussions on access to materials have caused me to reflect on how access is restricted or influenced in a school. The right of access to an adult collection does not exist, but we restrict children in other ways. Some of these are tendencies shared with public children's librarians, others are not:

1. the librarian who selects or does not select;
2. the principal who sets school policy;
3. the nurse-teacher who does not want the children to read sex books before she teaches them the unit;
4. the reading teacher who wants the child to have books only on his or her reading level;
5. the classroom teacher who does not want children to borrow Christmas books in October;
6. the parent who wants to deny a book to all students; and
7. the custodian who reports when the librarian weeds the collection.

Slashed budgets and staff cuts have also been mentioned. School librarians are familiar with this problem, too. A clerical assistant is a staff member unknown to most elementary school librarians. We work alone, except for volunteers (usually mothers of pupils) whose intent is

commendable but whose usefulness is questionable. While prices go up, budgets for libraries and schools go down.

Librarians are often criticized for talking about books too much at meetings rather than talking about children and services. If this is so, how can it be that for the past four days, none of the children's librarians here has referred to the fact that this week is Children's Book Week?

REFERENCES

1. Joeckel, Carleton B., and Winslow, Amy. *A National Plan for Public Library Service*. Chicago, ALA, 1948, p. 93.
2. Dyer, Esther R. "New Perspective on Cooperation in Library Services to Children," *School Media Quarterly*, 5:261-70, Summer 1977.
3. Ibid., p. 269.
4. Scurrah, Lore. Personal communication, Oct. 20, 1977.